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CEREBUS

GOING HOME

12

243
JUN

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2750 Holly Hall
Houston, TX 77054
April 16, 1999

Dave Sim
AARDVARK-VANAHEIM

Dear Dave,

Re: your letter — fair enough. I'll be as succinct as possible.

My letter, printed in *Cerebus* #236, drew a comparison between certain of your views (as I understood them) and views expressed by Saint Augustine, both of which essentially found fault with a lack of any real ethics informing the response of audiences to a given form of fictional entertainment. I took a devil's-advocate position and asserted that it is difficult to prove how much "ethical enlightenment" is "transmitted" to human beings via all the "works of fiction/religion/mythology" to which they are exposed. (Though I think this statement could apply in any place and time, I should have stated that I can only judge this to be true of my own locus in time and space.) For me the bracketing of what might be called three "Departments of Cultural Influence" — fiction, religion, and mythology — was a loose association only, and not an implication that they were identical in form and content. Thus, when I associated one figure from religion (Christ) with two from fiction (Superman and Cerebus), I was associating all three only in terms of their potential for "ethical influence," a potential to which others besides myself have attested, however rightly. I was not stating that any figure from either religion or mythology was *ipso facto* fictional, or possessed a value equivalent to figures of fiction. In my writings I have always striven to keep from easily conflating figures from different conceptual departments, and, as far as I am concerned, I believe I have always done so. Thus the views you describe as "self-exalting and infantile" bear no resemblance to mine.

Cordially,

Gene Phillips

CEREBUS
NO. 243 JUNE 1999

DAVE SIM
Creator, Writer, Characters/ pencil & ink, lettering mechanical tones

GERHARD
Background Artist/pencil & ink, mechanical tones cover photo

CAROL WEST
Administrative Assistant

DIANA SCHUTZ
Proofreading

GOING HOME

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BOOK ONE
Sudden Moves
(Cerebus 232 to 239)

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BOOK TWO
Fall and the River
(Cerebus 240 to 250)

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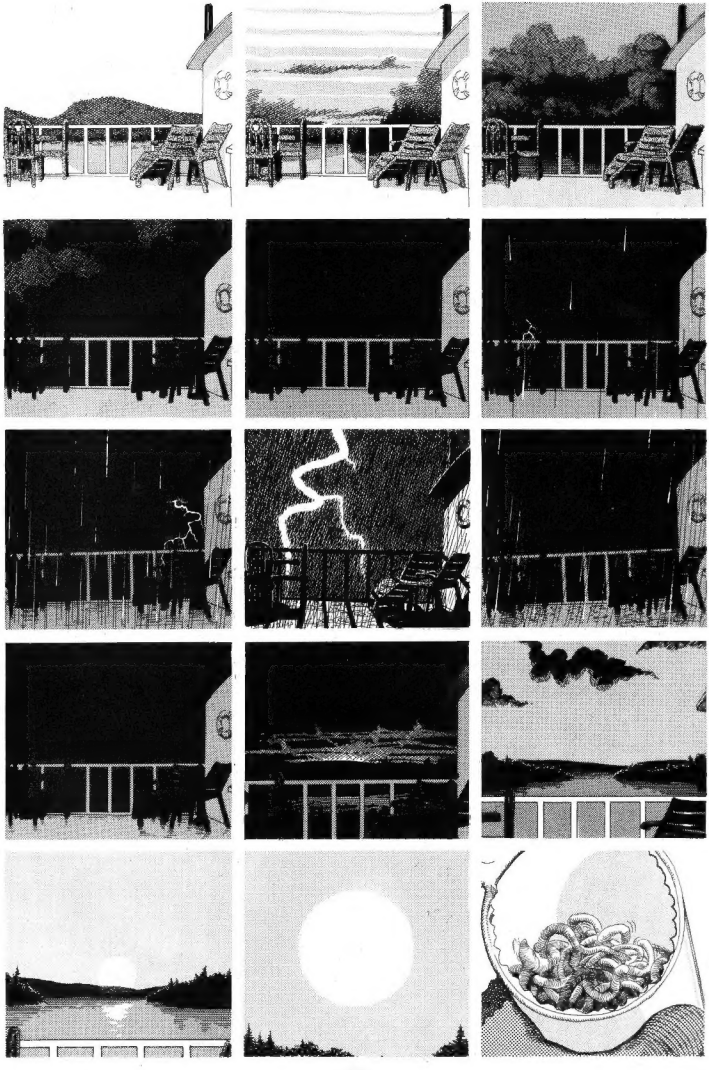
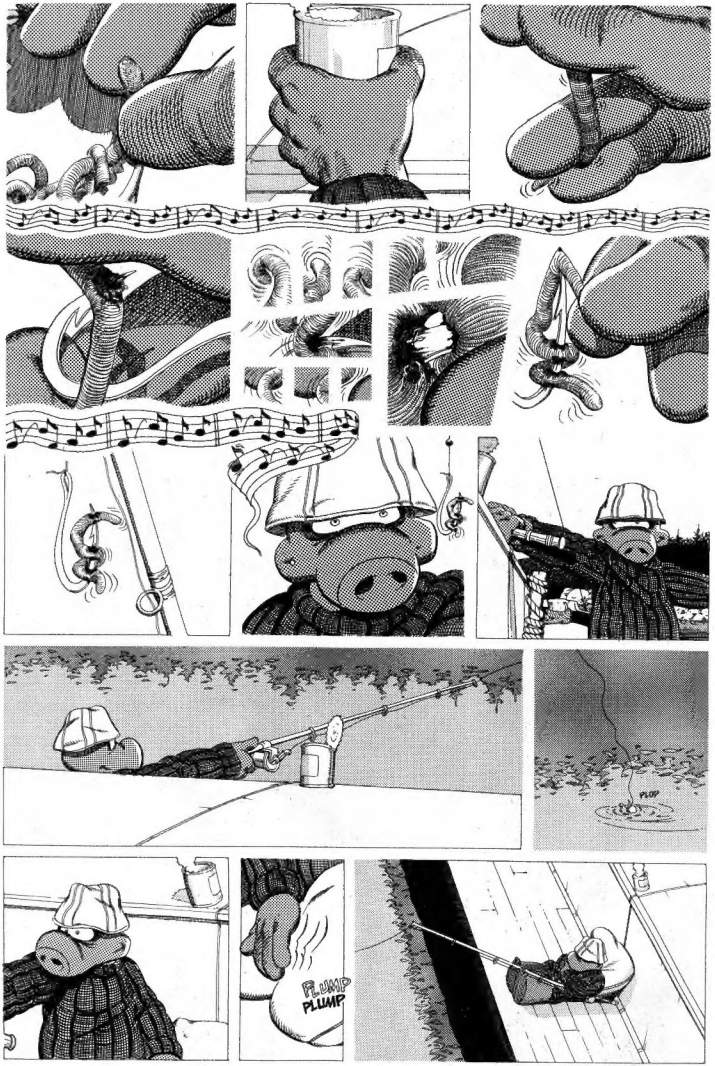
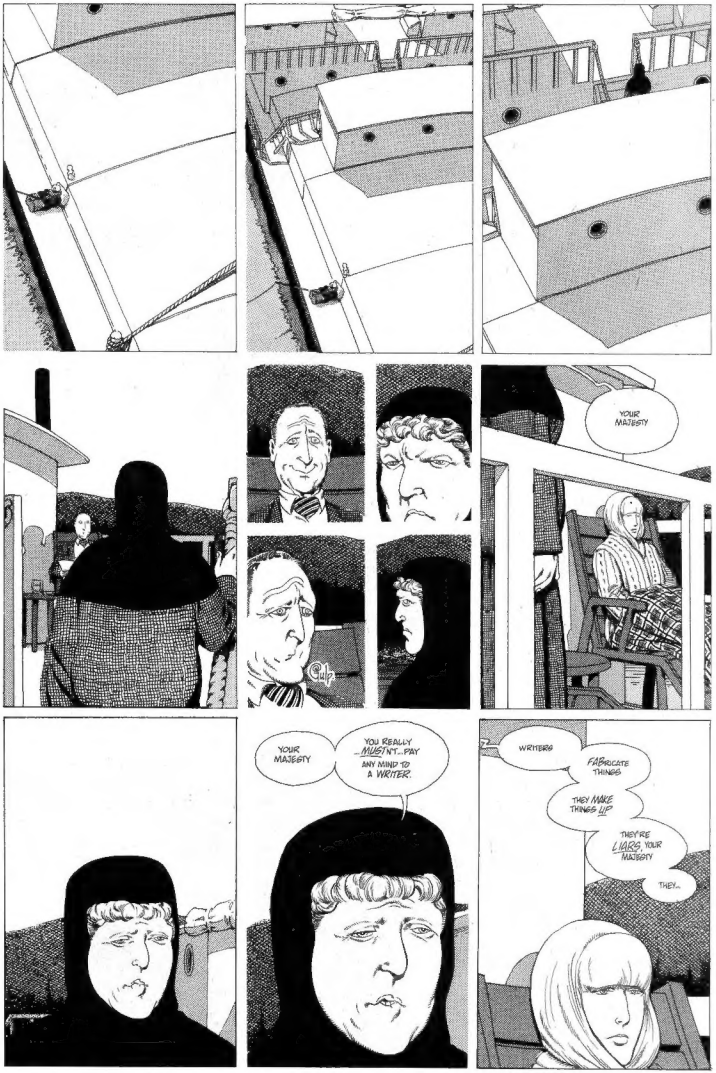
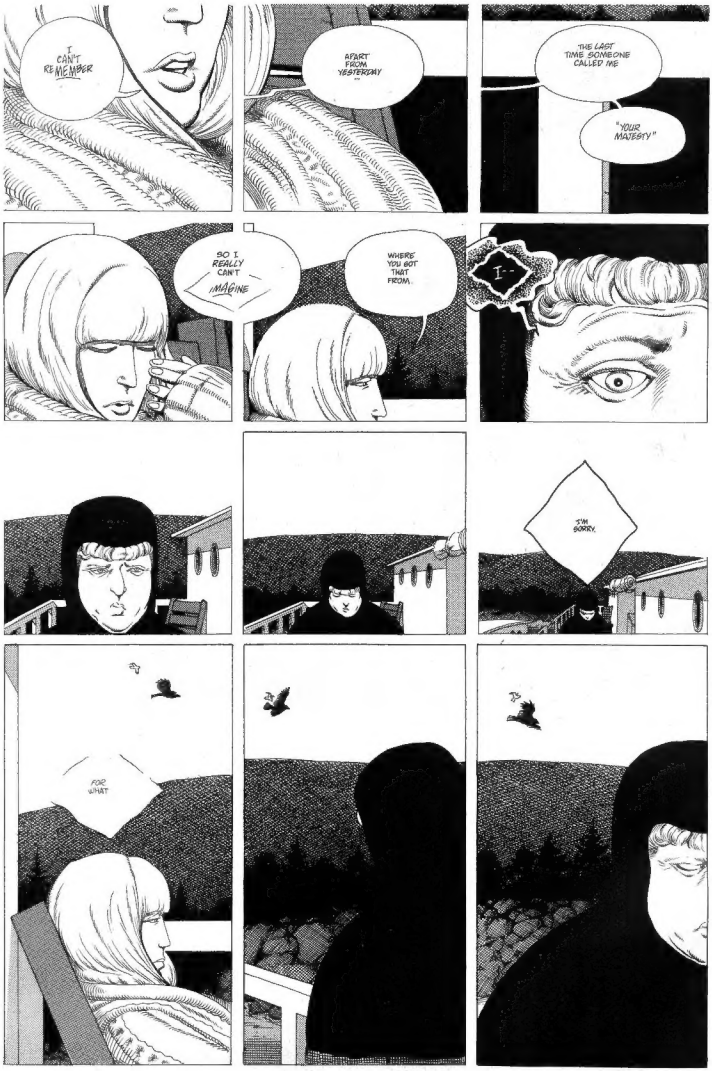
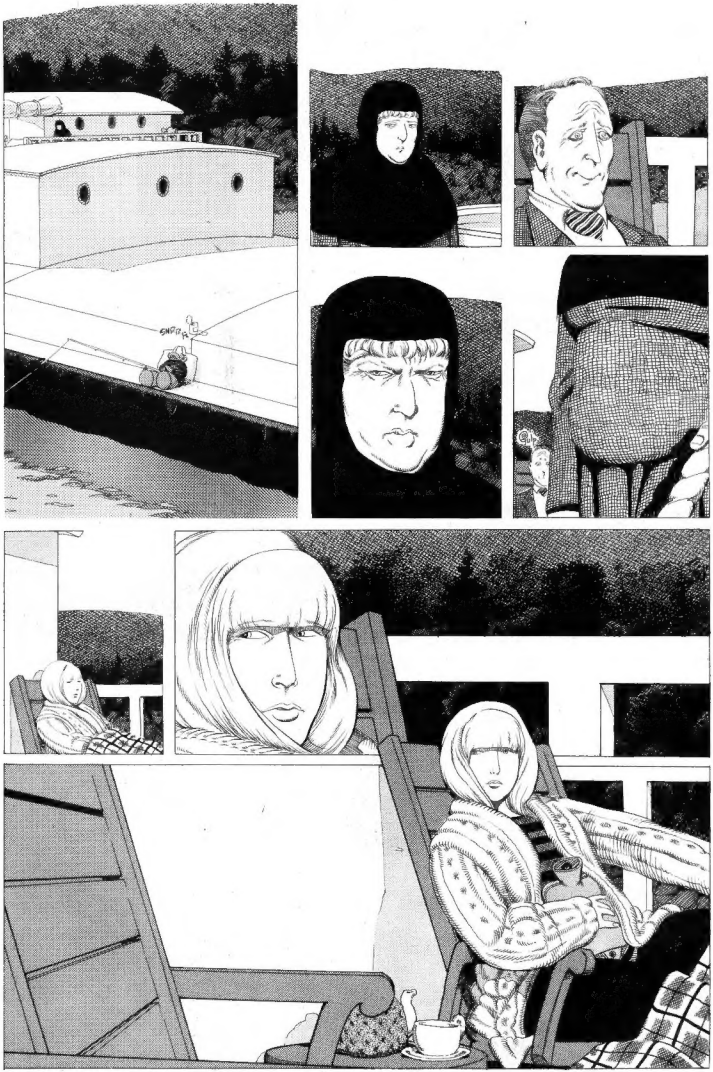



PLOP
PLUMP
PLUMP


YOUR MAJESTY
YOUR MAJESTY
YOU REALLY _MUSN'T_... PAY ANY MIND TO A WRITER.
WRITERS
FABRICATE THINGS
THEY MAKE THINGS UP
THEY'RE _LIARS_, YOUR MAJESTY
THEY...


I CAN'T REMEMBER
APART FROM YESTERDAY
THE LAST TIME SOMEONE CALLED ME "YOUR MAJESTY"
SO I REALLY CAN'T IMAGINE
WHERE YOU GOT THAT FROM.
I--
I'M SORRY.
FOR WHAT



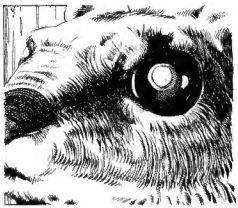
IF YOU WON'T PERMIT ME TO READ WHAT YOU'VE WRITTEN SO FAR...
PERHAPS YOU WOULD BE SO GOOD AS TO INFORM ME
HOW YOUR NOVEL
ENDS...
HOW...
...it ends...
-I'm afraid...
...has yet to be determined.
I CAN if you like tell you...
...WHERE...
...it ends.
It ENDS in the Sea of the South
on the island of Mealc
in a recently founded artistic colony.
A colony of writers, poets, painters and sculptors WHO...
...Well...
I believe YOU put it best in your introduction to M. Zulli's "Faces of Nature" lithograph series:
"...who have dedicated themselves to the perfecting of their Representational Arts..."
"Arts which do not simply imitate their real world counterparts, but which capture, as well..."
"...Life's enduring and multi-faceted Spirit, enriching the observer through myriad layers..."

"...of Beauty..."

"...of Mystery..."

"...of Meaning,"...

"...and of Artistic Insight."

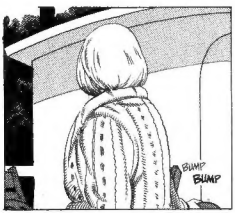


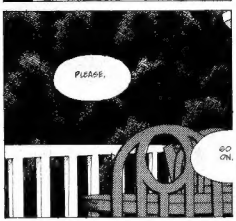
"All amplified, all echoing and resonant within the truths of the hard discipline of the True Artist's Craft;..."

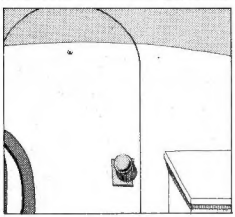
"...finding form in the meticulous..."

"...the scrupulous..."

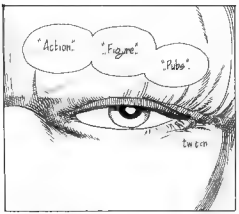
"...THE EXACTING..."

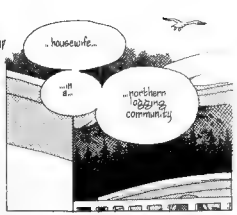


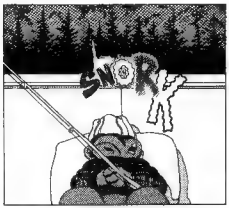


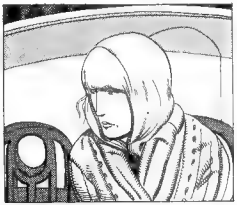


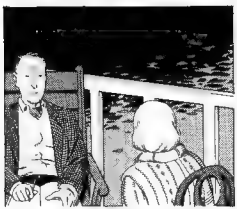
A colony lacking ONLY one crucial element:
a PATRONess
A RESIDENT patroness possessing such UNIMPEACHable credentials that even those materna!...
"sensibilities"...
which allow, endorse and ENCOURAGE the Chaotic, the haphazard, the Insensible and the INFANTILE in their "arts".
...would be FORCED -- out of DEFERENCE to this patroness -- to provide all required artistic materials and human necessities, in sufficient abundance...
...that the COLONY...
...thereby, insulated from the incursion of each worldly want and irritant...
...might FREE itself to achieve a...
...quite SPLENDID...
...fruition.
For the moment, it remains to be seen if she INTENDED... heroine of my novel...
...is POSSESSED of those elevated -- and ELEVATING -- qualities of a patroness
Alas...
...at the PARTICULAR juncture... the HORIZON of her patronage APPEARS.
to have LIMITED itself to the ENDORSEMENT of...

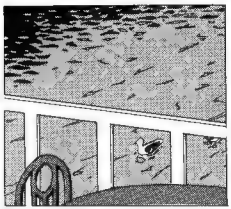


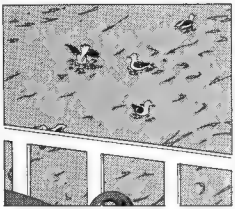


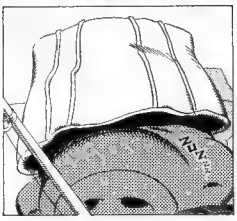












CHAP. XIV

1. Ricke appears vnto Cerebvs 3 Ricke taketh vp Cerebvs 4 The baptizing of the disciples 5 The signe of the latter daies 6 Cerebvs returnes to

THe Prophet Ricke, fulfilling the promise hee had made in the Sanctvarie, appeared vnto Cerebvs in the spirit, speaking vnto Cerebvs and saying:

2 The waters abound with the new and faithful, but as yet the fishers are few

Come and see.

3 Then Ricke taketh up Cerebvs in the spirit and setteth him vpon the waters and, lo,

4 Cerebvs beheld Ricke in the Feldwar wilderness, baptizing disciples in the Name of the One God (howsobeit Ricke himselfe baptized not, but his disciples:)

5 And Cerebvs marueiled and perceiued not what hee saw (that it might be a signe in

and with that, her ruffled dignity returned to its place of concealment beyond her stateroom.

Jay Anthony had been too long about the business of rending veils of self-deception not to recognize "You've given me a lot to think about" as euphemistic: meaning—more often than not—"You've given me a great deal to forget and a great deal to rationalize out of existence." With so much at stake, Jay Anthony still dreaded the possibility that Ginevra would expend the balance of their journey in splendid and miserable self-isolation, gazing wistfully upon the countryside which was sliding, inexorably, past the creaking and groaning behemoth of a barge on which she found herself, while she mused, endlessly, about whether the scenery or vessel was a more apt metaphor for her largely failed existence. The surgical incision of Jay Anthony's challenge would be scarring now, pink and bright below the threshold of her conscious awareness and—with the effortless convenience of a reversible garment—transforming itself into that state of wounded grace so beloved by her gender.

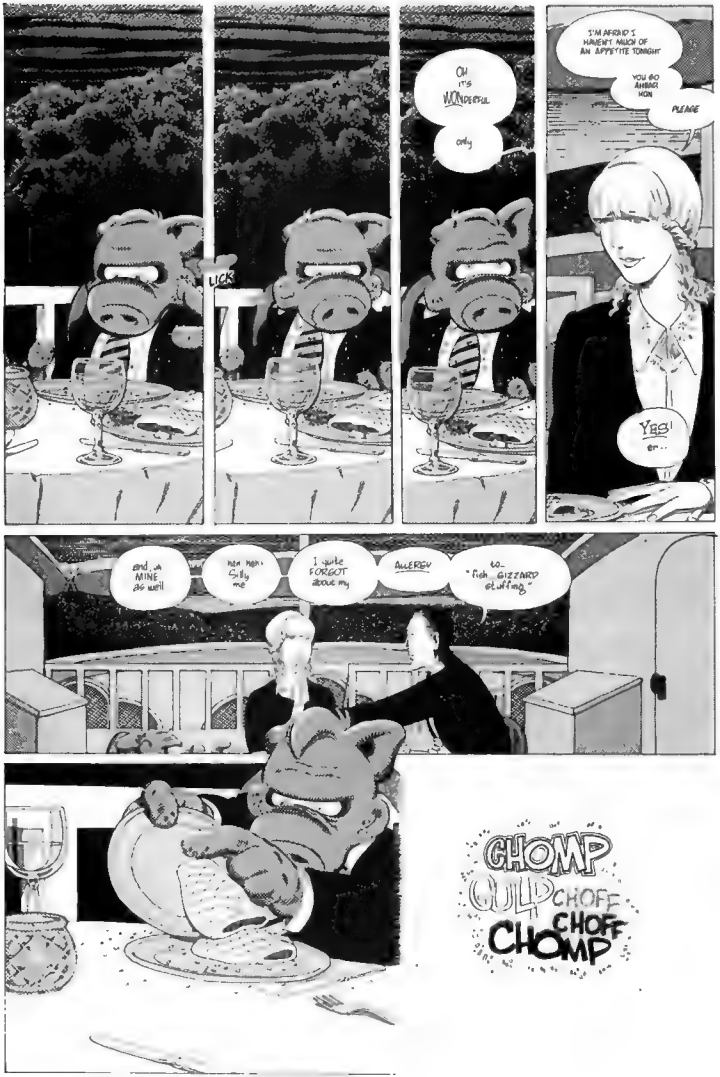
Nurturing its *own* empathic woundedness—womankind's second greatest love—his triune audience would now be readying rotten fruit and browning vegetables in anticipation of the second act of the autumnal melodrama and Jay Anthony's *role* as playwright, director, and (*hissss*) first villain. Unless he missed his guess, this very night would see—after Ginevra and Jozan had repaired to her stateroom and Jay Anthony to his own— the descent of the first-act curtain upon the *haute cuisine* debris of their evening meal.

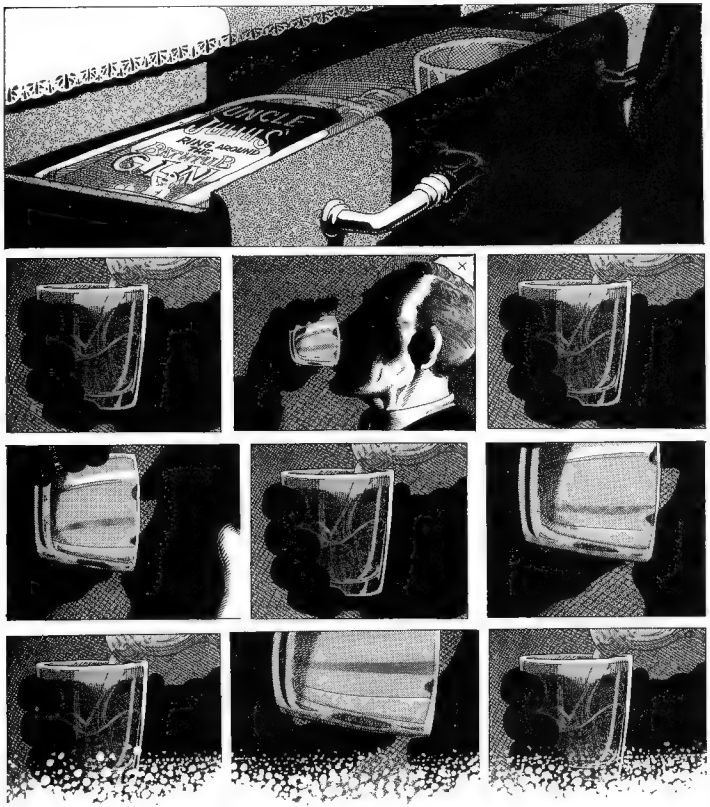
By then—with all the painstaking circumspection and finesse of the conversational "angler's" expertise— Jay Anthony would hope to have danced and skimmed his baited pleasantries across the still surface above his intended heroine's higher ideals.

Mentally arranging his tactics, he mused that he might yet fan her spark of interest into a small but unquenchable flame: might yet foreshadow—both for Ginevra and for their audience—the transformation of the "people's princess" into the "Patroness of Mealc" in the second... and final... act.

LOVELY, HON.
IT'S JUST NOT SOMETHING I WANT TO SEE
ESPECIALLY WHEN I'M HAVING MY
SORRY SORRY CERBERUS WASN'T THINKING...
CERBERUS'LL JUST TAKE IT DOWN TO THE GALLEY AND SHOW THE MOTHERS HOW TO COOK IT
DON'T LAUGH
BAD! BAD!

CHOFF
CLUP
CHOMP
CLOM
CHOFF


LICK
OH IT'S WONDERFUL
only
I'M AFRAID I HAVEN'T MUCH OF AN APPETYTE TONIGHT
YOU GO AHEAD MOM
PLEASE
Yes!
er..
and a MINE as well
hee hee! Silly me
I quite FORGOT about my
ALLERGY
to.. "fish GIZZARD stuffing."
CHOMP
GULP
CHOFF
CHOFF
CHOMP



to the fact that Ginevra had forgotten, already, the radiant destiny he had painted for her—in broad and vivid brushstrokes—earlier in the day: resigned as well to the certainty that his own fate was far from enviable and still further from assured. All eyes would be upon him now, at the commencement of the second act. In just so pressure-laden a circumstance, in another time, he would have found refuge in a bout of excessive drinking. But tonight—with a small glass of gin untouched and forgotten at his elbow—it was a more mature Jay Anthony Diver who considered his next move.

"I'll give them a show," he thought, buoyant at the sudden insight. "They always want to know what I'm thinking. Very well, I shall *tell* them. I shall give it to them *straight*, shorn of all sugared coverings, bereft of forelock-tugging and..."

No, he amended. I shall tell my*self*.

Small but galvanizing waves of potentiality crawled enticingly across Jay Anthony Diver's scalp.

I shall go out there and my interior voice will speak aloud, for once, without compromise or amendment. Afterward—if they see no recourse but to execute me, then well and good. Afterward—they will be *welcome* to execute me and welcome to execute *Xena*, as well, if it comes to that. Afterward—they can cook and eat our two corpses with Jay-Anthony-and-Xena-Gizzard-Stuffing for all that I care!

Jay Anthony rose from his chair, resolute and [illegible]

PARDON?
Heh
CEREBUS SAID "YOU'RE REALLY QUIET TONIGHT"
"WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?"
ART
BRUSH BRUSH BRUSH BRUSH
"ART?"
"ART" WHO?
YOU KNOW.
PAINTING?
PICTURES?
SCULPTURE.
OH.
AYE
BRUSH BRUSH

I GUESS I M JUST NOT IN A TALKING... MOOD
IS THAT ALL RIGHT.
HUNH?
...S IT ALL RIGHT WITH YOU THAT I M.
OH, AYE.
AYE
WE COULD SIT OUTSIDE AND... HOLD HANDS
AND JUST... LOOK AT THE STARS...
IF YOU LIKE
KA
KLAK

HOW d' ye do do?
ON THE OTHER HAND, WE COULD JUST GO TO BED.
HUH? OH
AYE
LET'S DO THAT
IS HE STILL OUT THERE?
AYE. MUCH
S THING THAT I SHOULD TELL YE ABOUT
FACE?
THE STORY
...WHEREUPON

CHASING SCOTT

Page 232 — Of course, M. Zulli's lithograph series "Faces of Nature," exists only in "Fall and the River." The actual images have been photocopied out of a couple of issues of *The Puma Blues* by Stephen Murphy and Michael Zulli (a comic book which I published back in the 1980s through the now — mercifully — defunct Aardvark One International.) I met Michael and Stephen at the now — regrettably — defunct Moondance Comics in Hadley, Massachussetts, the same weekend that I first met Kevin Eastman and Pete Laird. Michael brought a couple of professionally matted pages of his and Stephen's collaboration to my signing and asked me what I thought they should do with *The Puma Blues*. Foolishly, I told them that they should let *me* publish it, and — apart from the first volume of Steve Bissette's *Taboo* horror anthology — *The Puma Blues* became my last foray into publishing other creators' works. Despite my unnecessary intrusion, by all accounts Michael and Stephen have gone on, subsequently, to have successful and fulfilling lives and careers.

Needless to say…

(Oh, wait. This is the very, very late 20th century.)

I find it necessary to point out…

…that Jaka did *not*, in fact, write the introduction to M. Zulli's lithograph series, which F. Stop Kennedy is reciting here. In her capacity as Princess of Palnu, she prevailed upon some star-struck and too-chivalrous-for-words writer of note to do so on her behalf, and then she signed her name to it. Of course, typical of the Jakas of this world, she has half-persuaded herself that she *did* write the introduction — again, typically — by mistaking seminal impetus and the fact that she substituted a synonym here or there in the finished work for the act of creation itself. Astute fellow that he is, F. Stop Kennedy is fully aware that the piece is ghostwritten. Even *more* astute fellow that he is, F. Stop Kennedy pretends to believe that Jaka is, indeed, the authoress and has (even *more* astutely) gone to the trouble of reconstructing it from memory, thus breaching, with minimal effort, the impregnable walls with which Jaka otherwise surrounds herself. There is, as F. Stop Kennedy is only too aware, more than one way to skin an aristocratic cat.

Page 233 — I was trying for two layers of meaning with this page. Those who find more than a single layer of intended meaning "pretentious" or Pretentious are invited to skip over this note.

a) Resonant with F. Stop Kennedy's recitation of Jaka's ghostwriter's observations on "high end" representational art (in comic-book art, "high end" would exist at the end of the spectrum typified by the Michael Zulli eagle head which I photocopied from an issue of *The Puma Blues* and pasted very much in the middle and *very* much at the *top* of the page — and at the "low end" of the spectrum by, let us say, Julie Doucet and her ilk), I "raised the bar" for myself by setting the Zulli eagle head as my challenge. I then photocopied another *Puma Blues* panel on settings of 100%, 200%, and 400% (200% twice, actually) for panels 4, 3, and 2 respectively, traced them off and then attempted to bring to bear on the successive enlargements the same degree of polish and detail and exactitude that Michael brought to bear on his eagle head some ten or twelve years ago. Knowing in advance what a miserable failure my effort would be — by contrast with Michael's, if nothing else — I specially selected a panel of a terrified flying squirrel (yes, that is what the creature is supposed to be and what, in Michael's original panel, it unquestionably *is*). When it comes to nature shots, Michael Zulli = eagle; Dave Sim = terrified flying squirrel.

(b) Jaka's misapprehension that she has fooled, intimidated, and impressed F. Stop Kennedy with her introduction to M. Zulli's lithograph series. Jaka = eagle; F. Stop Kennedy = terrified flying squirrel.

(c) By pretending to be fooled, intimidated, and impressed by "Jaka's" introduction, F. Stop Kennedy herds the People's Princess into a corner from which there is no escape, save by the route he intends her to take. F. Stop Kennedy = eagle; Jaka = terrified flying squirrel. Of course, Jaka is too unsophisticated to even know that this is going on — but that's what makes the F. Stop/Jaka character combination such fun to work with.

Page 242 — Never having come close, myself, to the hardcore level of alcoholism represented by F. Scott Fitzgerald and F. Stop Kennedy, I am curious as to what the "lowest circle of hell" might be. This, it seems to me, is the second last "stop (pun intended) on the railroad" before gulping it straight out of the bottle.

Page 243 — It was a curious aspect of F. Scott Fitzgerald's makeup that he denied — consistently — being an alcoholic, in his personal correspondence, his conversation, his public essays, and, all evidence would seem to indicate, to himself. In the first instalment of his three-part series for *Esquire* in 1936 ("The Crack-Up," "Handle with Care," and "Pasting it Together"), Fitzgerald writes:

> William Seabrook in an unsympathetic book tells, with some pride, and a movie ending, of how he became a public charge. What led to his alcoholism or was bound up with it was a collapse of his nervous system. Though the present writer was not so entangled — having

at the time not tasted so much as a glass of beer for six months — it was his nervous reflexes that were giving way — too much anger and too many tears.

Fitzgerald did a lot of this gilding of lilies. He might've been off the sauce for three weeks, and that would miraculously become six months when he related it in a letter or conversation. He might've steered away from gin (his tipple of choice, because it is reputed to be odourless — which I imagine it is, unless you drink a quart of it a day), but he would replace it with (get this) twenty or thirty beers. Big improvement. Not only was it demonstrably untrue that he had not "tasted so much as a glass of beer for six months" at the time of his "Crack-Up," but…note the "at the time" "qualifier." So enmeshed was F. Scott Fitzgerald in his own self-destruction, it seemed to have escaped him — entirely — that one can go for a period of six months without so much as a taste of a glass of beer and still be an irretrievable alcoholic. Note, as well, the "too much anger and too many tears" reference. Scott's inability/unwillingness to grow up in any meaningful sense of the term (to which I have alluded previously) stands out in even sharper relief when placed alongside his inability/unwillingness to recognize (particularly in the context of his own Masculine Time Period) that "too much anger and too many tears" are not normal/helpful/sensible/reasonable/wise masculine reactions to life's stresses and strains, bumps and grinds…and that alcoholism was a good bet if he was casting about for a primary cause of the degraded state in which he found himself. As John Dos Passos wrote to him in the fall of 1936·

> I've been wanting to see you, naturally, to argue about your *Esquire* articles — Christ, man, how do you find time in the middle of the general conflagration to worry about all that stuff?…(w)e're living in one of the damnedest tragic moments in history — if you want to go to pieces I think it's absolutely O.K., but I think you ought to write a first rate novel about it (and you probably will) instead of spilling it in little pieces for (*Esquire's*) Arnold Gingrich…*(f)orgive the locker room pep talk.*

Italics mine. Although I'm sure this is all quite beyond the effete interests of the inhabitants of our androgynous age, I think that Dos Passos struck exactly the right note. By 1936, Fitzgerald was literally *years* overdue for *some* kind of man-to-man "locker room pep talk," so profoundly unaware did he appear to be of how inappropriate his references to "nervous reflexes…giving way" and "too much anger and too many tears" were in light of the infinitely more serious worldwide depression and imminent European war.

Throughout her various treatments and therapies, Zelda held pretty firmly to the view that her relationship with Scott — and her own mental health — would experience a decided improvement if Scott would just quit drinking. There's a good case to be made for this, I think. Pretty clearly, after the Edouard Jozan episode, Fitzgerald's not insignificant drinking problem worsened dramatically into full-blown alcoholism, and his alcoholic "mean streak" mushroomed in tandem with it. In their correspondence Zelda would allude to his extreme cruelty on those occasions when he would disappear for most of a day and night (Notebook entry: "I think I'd better go out and stay too long, don't you?") and return oozing malice and alcohol from every pore. No large coincidence, I think, that Anthony and Gloria's first major marital battle takes place when Anthony has had too much to drink (*The Beautiful and Damned,* page 196):

> With Eric Merriam, Anthony had been sitting over a decanter of Scotch all the hot summer afternoon, while Gloria and Constance Merriam swam and sunned themselves at the Beach Club, the latter under a striped parasol-awning, Gloria stretched sensuously upon the soft hot sand, tanning her inevitable legs. Later they had all four played with inconsequential sandwiches; then Gloria had risen, tapping Anthony's knee with her parasol to get his attention.
>
> "We've got to go, dear."
>
> "Now?" He looked at her unwillingly. At that moment nothing seemed of more importance than to idle on that shady porch drinking mellowed Scotch, while his host reminisced interminably on the byplay of some forgotten political campaign.
>
> "We've really got to go," repeated Gloria.
>
> "We can get a taxi to the station ..Come on, Anthony!" she commanded a bit more imperiously.
>
> "Now see here — " Merriam, his yarn cut off, made conventional objections, meanwhile provocatively filling his guest's glass with a high-ball that should have been sipped through ten minutes. But at Gloria's "We really *must*!" Anthony drank it off, got to his feet and made an elaborate bow to his hostess.
>
> "It seems we 'must,'" he said, with little grace.

"…sitting over a *decanter* of *Scotch* all the hot summer afternoon…"

"…*filling* his guest's glass with a high-ball that should have been sipped through *ten minutes.*"

If this episode has its real-life Scott-and-Zelda counterpart, then it seems pretty obvious (to me, anyway, and I've been known to have a drink or two in my day) that this is very, very heavy drinking that we are talking about here and Zelda/Gloria isn't so much

being imperious as sensible: Scott/Anthony is already disastrously drunk, and she really has no choice but to persuade him to leave before his condition worsens — as Zelda/Gloria no doubt knows from experience that it will — to such an extent that leaving becomes physically impossible. It is interesting to me that Scott Fitzgerald treats alcohol in *The Beautiful and Damned* with the same cheerful fatalism with which he treats matrimony: "Heh-heh. *Booze*, eh? What's a fellow to do?"

DO?! STOP DRINKING !! NOW!! COMPLETELY!! YOU CAN'T HANDLE IT!! SCOTT!! THINK OF YOUR TALENT!! YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD'S LITERATURE, etc. etc. (or "ect. ect." as Scott wrote, idiosyncratically, all his life).

Page 246 — Later in the same chapter of *The Beautiful and Damned*, after a particularly confusing and horrific episode at one of Anthony and Gloria's parties (I say " confusing" because I've read the book — or most of it — three times now and I still can't figure out what happened to Gloria/Zelda or what Scott *thinks* happened to Gloria/Zelda or what Gloria/Zelda *told* Scott happened to her…anyway:), Gloria flees from her house in terror and, after she is discovered missing, is pursued by Anthony, Maury Noble, and Dick Caramel, who track her to a small railway station:

> Anthony and Dick converted a long box into a back rest and found a board dry enough for Gloria to sit on. Anthony dropped down beside her and with some effort Dick hoisted himself onto an apple-barrel near them.
>
> Thus, the stage is set for what is, in my opinion, one of the strangest pieces of writing in Scott Fitzgerald's total output (right up there with the "*apropos* nothing" introductory paragraph to his short story "Dalyrimple Goes Wrong") and one of the strangest monologues in the history of American literature:
>
> "How do you do!" The voice, sonorous and funereal, had come from above, and they looked up startled to find that in some manner Maury had climbed to the roof of the shed, where he sat dangling his feet over the edge, outlined as a shadowy and fantastic gargoyle against the now brilliant sky.
>
> "It must be for such occasions as this," he began softly, his words having the effect of floating down from an immense height and settling softly upon his auditors, "that the righteous of the land decorate the railroads with bill-boards asserting in red and yellow that 'Jesus Christ is God,' placing them, appropriately enough, next to announcements that 'Gunter's Whiskey is Good.'"
>
> There was gentle laughter and the three below kept their heads tilted upward.

I can't honestly say which it was that I found more troubling and/or difficult about Maury Noble's ensuing speech: stealing it, inverting it, parodying it — or trying to make the whole thing make sense.

It took most of a year and all of one monthly instalment (*Cerebus* 244, July 1999) to bring it from the initial concept to the finished — for better or worse — execution.

At the point of greatest reduction, I suppose that I can console myself — at the very least — with the fact that I never have to work on those twenty pages again.

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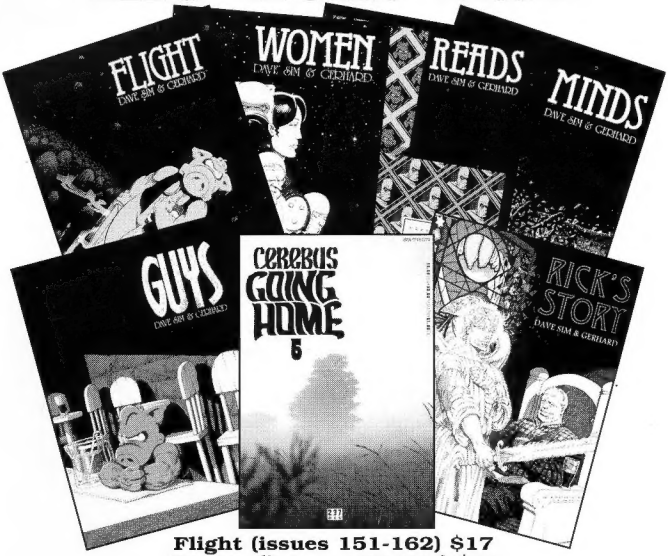

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